

Despair and Hope--Chapter One

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Summary: After the Carpathia docks, Rose is left alone in a world without anyone, including the love of her life.

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Note: Please read the Prologue first. Thanks.

Disclaimer is in the prologue.

The first few days after the sinking, Rose was in a daze, the shock having almost completely distorted her perception of reality around her. Everything seemed surreal, detached, as if it were happening to someone else. She almost convinced herself that it was--that she was asleep in the comforts of her own bed, and Jack was there with her, the beat of his heart pressing against her chest. She could even feel the delicious heat emanating from his body, warming her to the core. The sinking was simply a nightmare from which she would wake any moment, with Jack there to comfort her. But the nightmare was not ending. And Jack was not going to be there to comfort her when she awoke to the reality of the situation.

Yet she continued to disbelieve what had occurred. On the Carpathia, she said nothing to anyone. When asked a question, she either ignored it or nodded her head halfheartedly. She was offered hot meals, and although desperately hungry, the thought of eating after Jack had perished sickened her. Why should she eat when Jack would never be able to again? How could she ever eat--or do anything enjoyable for that matter--knowing that Jack would never be able to do those things

because of her? He had sacrificed himself for her: Rose DeWitt Bukater, the spoiled and selfish little high-class, upper-society rich girl. She could have tried harder to save him, but the selfish little girl in her had allowed him to die needlessly. *I could have done something* were the words that played through her mind relentlessly, unceasing, like a bad song that you could not get rid of. But no matter how hard she tried to justify the events involving the sinking and Jack's death, Rose could not help but think there was something--anything--she could have done.

Stop it, Rose. Some way to keep your promise.

She watched her own actions as if through a window, unable to react, just respond automatically, as if she were some kind of machine. Not a minute escaped that she did not think of Jack. Her mind went over every smallest detail about him, desperate to etch him in her memory with precise accuracy. She did not want to forget the smallest thing.

Closing her eyes, she could clearly see his intense blue eyes gazing at her from across the portrait he was drawing of her. She could see the warm blush in his cheeks that she had teased him about. *Jack, I want you to draw me like one of your French girls, wearing this. Wearing only this.+ The sexual tension in the room had been like electricity. It surged through the entire room, enveloping both of them, yet they had not succumbed to their passion then. That had come later--in the Renault. Her heart skipped at the memory--possibly one of the most precious memories of her entire life.

Where to, miss? he had asked her, taking the wheel in mock snobbery, nose pointed toward the heavens.

To the stars, she had whispered seductively into his ear, taking him underneath his arms and pulling him into the back seat with her. They had gazed at each other for several intense moments, both knowing what would come next.

Are you nervous? he had asked her caringly, his voice brimming with his love for the beautiful woman he held in his arms.

No, she had answered honestly. She was with Jack. She had nothing to be nervous about. Never in her life had she had or done anything that felt so right. Her entire heart and soul screamed out Jack's name with a certainty she had never felt before with anyone. Deliberately, she had taken one of his fingers and placed it against her lips, sucking gently before moving on to the next. She had been overjoyed at his sharp intake of breath. Put your hands on me, Jack.

And he did, reaching up to place his right hand gingerly on her breast. He had been so gentle, selflessly absorbed in her every need as he pulled his head down to take her lips with his, kissing her hungrily as the flame erupted around them. He had lowered her down into the seat, ever so gently, despite his passion, and had positioned himself over her. And then the world melted away. Titanic melted away. Nothing in the world was real at that moment except Jack and Rose and the Renault deep in the bowels of the Titanic where they made love. The night itself disappeared and time stood still for them. It was their moment in time, for nothing else mattered. Not even the fact that in just a few minutes, their plans for a future

together would be permanently altered by the unmerciful hand of God.

Tears threatened to overwhelm Rose at the memory as she sat alone on the steerage deck of the Carpathia. Lost in her reverie, she almost did not notice the voice of the officer across the deck. "Sir, I don't think you'll find any of your people down here. This is all steerage." Rose glanced over out of the corner of her eye, and nearly passed out from the shock. There, walking toward her, was the disheveled form of Caledon Hockley. She panicked briefly, pulling her blanket up over her head as not to be noticed. Her heart pounded against her ribs as he walked past her, giving hardly a glance in her direction. He was so close now. And look--he genuinely seemed to grieve. All she needed to do was reach out her hand, or say his name, and she would have it all back--the money, the lifestyle, the high social status . . .

Suddenly, she stopped herself with a shock. What was she thinking? How could she possibly think such a thing! She was finally free of her cage and was now thinking of having it back? And let Jack die in vain? Never! *Cal tried to kill you,* she reminded herself firmly, remembering the horror of having him chase her and Jack through the bowels of the sinking ship, with gunshots raining behind them with each desperate step. He had been mad. He would have killed both of us.

Rose turned her head slightly to watch him as he looked around almost dejectedly. She held her breath, praying that he would not see her. And then he was gone, just as quickly as he had come, apparently giving up on his lost "property."

She breathed a sigh of relief.

The next day was a blur of sights and sound, which she barely registered. It was time to leave the Carpathia. She found herself standing alone on the docking ramp. She wasn't really alone with the buzz of anxious reporters and what was left of the shocked Titanic survivors, but she might as well have been. She felt alone. She shivered suddenly, for the first time noticing the drizzle of the rain which she'd previously been oblivious to. It did not matter. In fact, the coldness of the wet rain suited what she felt inside as she made her first step into freedom. But why did freedom suddenly seem so lonely? So unbearable? But she knew the answer. *Without Jack . . .* The meaning of those words echoed painfully through her mind as she gazed up at the seemingly eternal and imposing figure of the Statue of Liberty--the ultimate symbol of her newfound freedom, as it had been for people in the past. The statue represented the beginning of her new life, but that failed to comfort her. It was the life she should be sharing with Jack. *When the ship docks, I'm getting off with you.*

This is crazy.

I know. It doesn't make any sense. That's why I trust it.

In her heart, she knew that Jack was with her, but the part of her who needed him with her physically could not accept that. She need him. *Why?* The ever eternal question. Why did destiny, or God, play such cruel games? How could God allow a terrible man like Caledon Hockley to live and let a good man like Jack Dawson die?

"Can I take your name, please, love?"

Rose turned her head to regard the young officer who had walked up beside her, only slightly startled by the intrusion. "Dawson," she answered him automatically, "Rose Dawson." The young man began to scribble her name in a small notebook before thanking her and walking quietly away, but Rose did not notice as her gaze returned to the Statue of Liberty, and her thoughts returned to her lost love.

Jack may only live on in her heart and in heaven, but she would now always have a part of him with her.

"I love you, Jack," she whispered aloud, the tears spilling down her frozen cheeks mingling and becoming one with the steady rain. She could almost hear his voice as clearly as she had heard it only a few days ago. *Rose, winning that ticket was the best thing that ever happened to me . . . it brought me to you.* That he had said those words mere minutes before his death and after all that had happened, was astounding. He knew he would die, yet he was thankful for the time they'd shared despite everything. She suddenly knew she would never find a greater love. Was it possible to show more selflessness and love in the face of death than Jack Dawson had? Jack should have lived. He deserved to live. She knew that that bitter thought would consume her for a long time, but for Jack's sake and the sake of her promise, she had to be strong. Jack had said that she was strong. Even in death, she found herself not wanting to disappoint him.

She shivered again, the coldness and wetness suddenly reminding her of an all too recent memory that she'd just as soon forget for the time being. *I have to find shelter before I catch my death.* She winced at her own use of the phrase.

Tucking her hands deep in her coat pocket in an attempt to warm her frozen hands, her left hand brushed against something hard and cold. Frowning slightly, she pulled it out. In her palm was 'The Heart of the Ocean.' She stared at the necklace with the horridly large blue diamond in shock for a few moments, uncomprehending. Even in the darkness, it seemed to gather all the light, sparkling magically in her hand. Suddenly, she remembered that the coat she was wearing actually belonged to Cal. He had placed it on her before she was forced into the lifeboat that would take her away from Jack.

She allowed herself a small smile after the shock wore off. Yes, it was a link to Cal, but it was the only tangible object she had to remember Jack by--to assure herself that he had been real, that her imagination had not made him up in an effort to block out the reality of the situation around her. Once again, she went back to Jack's blue eyes, gazing at her sternly over the portrait, brow furrowed in professional concentration, but the erotic overtones of the situation had not been lost on either of them. *Jack, I want you to draw me like one of your French girls, wearing this. Wearing only this.*

She squeezed the 'Heart' tightly in her hand before replacing the sacred object back in the confines of the coat. Reaching her hand deeply into the other pocket, she was not surprised when her hand came up with several neat stacks of dollar bills, bound tightly together. Predictable. Cal would not have left a sinking ship without his precious money. It wasn't a large fortune, to be sure, but enough

for Rose to get by on until she figured out what she was going to do.

With that, she stepped off the docking ramp into the big city of New York. First thing's first. Find a place to stay the night. With a sigh, she headed out to start her new life as Rose Dawson.

Continued in Chapter Two.

End
file.